

# **Councillors accused of failing to use new short term let controls**

**Edinburgh councillors voted to approve a new short term let in the city centre in a decision branded “absolutely mad”.**

Housing campaigners blasted the council for not being tough enough, despite new powers to crack down on short term lets, saying the wants of landlords had been put before the needs of residents.

However city planners argued the proposal for a holiday let in the Old Town was acceptable as it was “compatible with the surrounding area”.

The adoption of the Scottish Government’s new development plan at Holyrood last month was billed as a watershed moment for the capital’s crackdown on short-term lets (STLs).

One of the new policies included in National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is that proposals for short stay accommodation would not be supported if they result in “an unacceptable impact on local amenity or the character of a neighbourhood” or “loss of residential accommodation where such loss is not outweighed by demonstrable local economic benefits”.

It was hoped that in effect, this would allow the council to refuse any STL application that came before it in a bid to address the city’s housing shortage by returning hundreds, potentially thousands of properties to residential use.

The planning sub-committee’s first ‘test’ of the new policy came last week as councillors considered a retrospective

holiday let application on Blair Street, off Cowgate, which was approved in a knife-edge vote.

Officers urged councillors to grant permission and said in a report while the proposal did not comply with the new planning framework, it was "compatible with the surrounding area" and there would be "a degree of economic benefit in STL use".

Cllr Chas Booth pushed back against the recommendation, and said: "It's accepted that this is a busy street, but there are some people who like to live in busy streets. The argument that this is going to be a short-term let or derelict is absolutely false."

He said the new powers were aimed at combating "spiralling rents in Edinburgh," adding: "The short term lets sector is contributing to that increase in rents."

He said: "It's absolutely clear this application is contrary to NPF4 which was introduced just last month.

"We would be absolutely mad in my view, given the housing crisis in our city, given that we now have the tools to refuse this application, we would be absolutely mad to grant it."

Committee convener Hal Osler said councillors had to "look at the wider context".

She said: "Because of the vibrancy of the area and the economic benefit, individuals who use short-term lets are more likely to go out and have dinner so the economic benefit from that side would probably be more beneficial.

"I do believe they have met the test in this case."

Members voted 6-5 in favour of granting planning permission.

Reacting to the decision, Eilidh Keay from tenants' union Living Rent said: "It is unbelievable that the council granted the STL application on Blair Street. They have just introduced new policies designed to limit STL but they are acting as if nothing has changed.

"In the midst of a housing crisis, the council should be doing everything in their power to prevent the loss of residential homes, like those on Blair Street.

"In approving the application, the council shows how it is continuing to put the wants of landlords and business before

the needs of Edinburgh' residents.

"The council have knowingly ignored their own policy, and the national planning framework, both of which prevent the loss of residential housing. Edinburgh's residents deserve better."

Cllr Alys Mumford said: "I'm deeply disappointed the council seems to have completely failed to stand up for renters at the first real test of this new planning policy.

"Private sector rents have risen by nearly 50 per cent over the last decade in Edinburgh, and the decision of development sub-committee on Wednesday was a kick in the teeth for renters."

STL operators in Edinburgh have until October to apply to the council for a licence as part of a new regulation scheme, which requires landlords using an entire property for holiday letting to also gain planning permission.

*by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter*

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